

# *The* SOUL RETRIEVAL

A Novel

By

Ann W. Jarvie

## *(An Excerpt from Chapter 1)*

Henrietta watched her husband as he left the kitchen, and kept staring long after he had disappeared from the room. When she turned back to Joe, he was giving her that intense look once again.

“It’s just as Bear foretold,” the Apache said. He closed his eyes and moved his hands in small circles with palms out. “The fire’s burning, but no one’s home in your teepee.”

“Excuse me?”

“You don’t feel like yourself, you’re feeling vacant and disconnected, like something’s missing.” Joe spoke as he opened his eyes.

She gaped at him in stunned silence before whispering: “How ... why would you say something like that?” Henrietta’s heart thumped in her chest as she nervously glanced toward the living room. Her husband was still talking on the phone.

“Your soul speaks volumes through your eyes.”

“You see something in my eyes?” And she rubbed them again with her handkerchief.

“I see what was there, what should be there, but is not now.”

“Don’t be silly. I’m fine. My eyes were just watering, that’s all.” She winced, knowing that it wasn’t true, hating that she’d become such a liar.

“It’s okay, I’m here to help,” Joe said. He placed his folded hands on the table after sitting down.

His smile and disarming empathy surprised Henrietta, but she wasn’t going to be moved by what seemed like a sweet and insightful gesture. Joe Loco was absolutely the last person in the world she’d choose to confide in.

“Thanks, but there’s really nothing to help with. I’m fine.” She was determined to maintain her fiction, though her stomach tightened and jumped as if trying to digest

rocks. Mechanically, she started to reheat some cooked bacon in the fry pan, stirred the grits she'd kept warm and cracked open a few fresh eggs next to the bacon. "Your breakfast will be ready in a few minutes." She diverted her eyes to avoid his continued scrutiny but could not help stealing a look back at him. *What is it with that Indian? Doesn't he know it's rude to stare?* she thought.

Joe continued to look fixedly at her as he hummed and tapped an accompanying tune on the table. He quieted for a moment without shifting his gaze. "It's okay, I'm here to help," he repeated.

*No!* Henrietta didn't want to be charmed or disturbed into divulging any sordid details of her past. She had simply wanted to be friendly to this man, and only in a neighborly sort of way because he worked with Jeff at the hospital and was Altie's husband. *But, dadgummit, he is pushing all kinds of buttons!*

Still hearing Jeff talking on the phone, she exhaled dramatically and turned to face Joe. Before she could stop herself Henrietta blurted out in a strained whisper: "Okay, I don't know how you know it, but you're right. Something awful's happened to me since our first mission here. And now, I feel like I'm not all here. Something is missing. And I don't know what." *Oh dear God! What am I doing? What am I saying?* She blushed, feeling exposed and vulnerable by her sudden candor. She jerked her hands up and covered her mouth.

"Don't worry. It's obvious your soul has fragmented and is in need of repair," Joe said with a calm certainty, as if it was an everyday matter to be dealt with.

"What?" Henrietta put her hands down and stared into space, bewildered by his words. In the quietude, the sizzle of the frying eggs and bacon filled the room like a choir of rattlers. *My soul has what?* When she looked again at Joe, planning to demand exactly what he meant, his eyes were closed, and he was whispering and holding his palms up as though in prayer.

So she placed the cooked food on a plate, poured a glass of milk and put both down in front of him. He opened his eyes and smiled up at her.

"That's one of the strangest things I've ever heard—a soul fragmenting," she said. "How would something like that even be possible?"

"It can happen when we believe or experience something bad we don't want to face." He took a bite of eggs and grits, closing his eyes again to savor the combination. "Oh, this is yum-yum," he said.

When he looked up, it was Henrietta who was staring.

"The good news is that lost soul fragments can be recovered and healed. It's not hard, if you know how, if you know the secret," Joe said.

"Are you saying you know how to do that? That you know the secret?"

"The Great Spirit works hitherto and I work."

She crossed her arms. "So what are you, some kind of soul repairman?"

“Ho, ha!” He laughed out loud. “In truth, I’m a practitioner of the Great Spirit’s bear medicine, which in your case, would start with a ritual called the soul retrieval. It’s something that could really help you.” Joe took a sip of milk while nodding to himself.

“Bear medicine? Soul retrieval? I was raised in a church where just saying that kind of stuff could get you tarred and feathered.” Henrietta tried to say it like a devil’s advocate and a joke, but she wasn’t kidding.

“I wasn’t aware your people use feathers in rituals,” Joe responded with no overt sarcasm, wiping his mouth with a napkin.

“Ha! That’s not exactly it.” She gave a false laugh, shaking her head. “I’m from a place where saying or even thinking things like that is considered blasphemous and will get you into a lot of trouble with Baptist ministers. Do you know what I’m saying?”

“Apaches consider asking questions to be so rude, it’s like a sacrilege,” he said, his voice uncharacteristically stern.

“Oh!” Henrietta blushed again as she realized she was still ignorant of many of the life-ways and traditions governing Medichero Apache Indians. “I’m sorry, I didn’t know.”

“Please, there’s no need to apologize. I was just trying to make a point: sometimes it makes sense to discard old rules that no longer serve. I actually believe asking questions is a great way to learn and grow. Do some of our elders consider me a heretic for thinking that?” He shrugged his shoulders. “Probably.”

“And that doesn’t bother you?” She’d never met someone so audacious or unconcerned about what others thought. Especially about what religious leaders thought.

“Religious dogma that’s become too rigid is like a hound dog with rigor mortis—not good for much.” He squeezed his nose between his fingers. “Smells bad, too.”

It didn’t exactly answer her question. Still she couldn’t help but smile.

“We must not fear questioning anything, even outdated rules of etiquette or what some consider forbidden,” the Apache continued. “We must not let dead dogs dictate our paths. We must follow the Great Spirit’s Truth wherever it may lead us.”

For several seconds, Henrietta stared out of the window at nothing, trying to assimilate all that he’d said, wondering if she should just dismiss it as nonsense. But she had to admit, given the horrible things she’d experienced, there was something undeniably intriguing, comforting and perhaps even tempting about his concept of retrieving and healing lost soul fragments. She realized she wanted to know more. *Could something like the soul retrieval really be possible? And could it help me?* Henrietta shook her head to clear it of this foolishness.

“Please keep eating before it gets cold,” she said, turning back to face him. It was all she could think of to say.

After finishing, Joe tidied up where he’d eaten, limped over to the sink with his dishes and rinsed them off. “That was a delightful breakfast—many thanks,” he said, bowing. “And those grits, they were terrific.”

“I’m glad you liked them. I brought them with us, all the way from South Carolina.”

“Please allow me to return the favor,” he said.

“Oh, you want to cook something for me?”

He shook his head, grinning. “If you want to experience the soul retrieval and more, please come to our teepee tomorrow; it’s right behind our house. At about noon would be good; my singing’s not required at the ceremonies then.”

*Me? Take part in a soul retrieval?* Her stomach fluttered, and Henrietta wasn’t sure if that meant the idea was appealing or if it just plain scared her.

“Um, thanks ...” she started. But the thought of letting a crazy Indian tinker around in her soul gave her more than pause. “I’ll have to think about your offer.”

“Altie can tell you more about it,” Joe said. “And, because we’ve already agreed, she won’t mind if you ask her any rude questions about it.” He smiled as he picked up the paper bag that contained his diaper costume, sport coat, work boots and, apparently, some hair supplies.

“What do you mean, you’ve already agreed?” she asked, once again taken aback.

Joe had no time to respond since Jeff returned and changed the subject. “Sorry, but Dr. Belzer wanted to fill me in on Billy Santana’s condition.”

“You were on the phone quite a while. Is everything okay?” Henrietta frowned, knowing that this favored child within the tribe had been in the hospital for about a week and his condition was critical, as he was among those affected by the influenza epidemic that had recently swept through the reservation.

“Let’s just say the boy’s stable for now,” Jeff said. He glanced at Joe with a frown, as if to belie his statement.

“I can go with you now and help,” Joe offered.

Jeff held up his palms. “You’ve got the ceremonies today, and I think we can handle it.”

“If you change your mind or if the situation changes, you know where I’ll be,” Joe said before turning back to Henrietta. “Again, thank you for a most delicious breakfast. *Ka-dish-day*, farewell, for now.”

“*Ka-dish-day*,” Henrietta and Jeff said at the same time as Joe limped out the door.

Her husband looked down at his watch. “I’m relieving Dr. Belzer in about forty-five minutes. Why don’t we go into the living room until I have to go?” He walked over and nibbled on her neck. His voice was both warm and animated as he added, “I’ve so much to tell you about my research.”

“Um,” she started. “There’s something I need to tell you, too.” *Maybe I can get it out this time.* She pushed back the wilting blond curls falling over her stinging eyes; her hands trembled.

“Well first, how about a little concerto? Just for you, Peaches,” he said, calling her his favorite pet name. He pulled her toward the living room piano.

**(An Excerpt from Chapter 2)**

After finishing the second nocturne, he looked up at her. “You know that I’ve been researching the high incidence of spontaneous healings here, right?” Jeff was both a lead physician and medical researcher at the Medichero Indian Hospital. He reached for a pack of cigarettes from the pocket of his short-sleeved white shirt.

“Uh-huh,” Henrietta said. She barely heard what he said. *How am I going to get into it? How am I going to tell him?* She had asked herself these questions at least a million times. She picked up a pen and notebook from the coffee table, trying to keep her hands busy.

Jeff smoked in silence a moment before continuing. “There’s more to it than even I imagined.”

“More to what?” she asked. She absently doodled on the page without looking up. *How am I going to tell him?*

Jeff blew smoke. “The spontaneous healings that I’m so interested in ... the medicine men here seem to be doing something *real* to affect the recoveries.”

Now he had her attention. “They are?” She looked at him. “Like what?”

Instead of answering, Jeff got up and turned toward the bay windows that cradled the piano in a small alcove off the living room of the doctor’s cottage. His silhouette against the bright morning light was a man-shaped eclipse, his muscled edges luminous and blurred by the smoldering tobacco. It gave him an unworldly appearance, and Henrietta was reminded about how often she felt like an outsider here, and even back home.

“Henrietta, would you mind if we stayed here a while longer this time?” Jeff stepped out of the blinding light. He had a grin on his face, but nervously rubbed his fingers through his light-brown hair.

“How much time are we talking about?” His first medical mission in Medichero five years ago had lasted six months; the second mission two years ago was cut short after only two weeks.

“I could really use another year, at least. Maybe two.”

“But we agreed to six months at a time, and your father ...” Henrietta’s heart began racing and her head throbbed.

“Listen, there’s been an increase in spontaneous remissions since the last time we were here, and this gives me an incredible opportunity. For research purposes, these live case studies are like gifts from heaven. But I won’t feel right about staying longer and pursuing them unless you’re okay with it.” He extinguished his cigarette, sat down next to her and gently rubbed the small of her back. “Please tell me you’re with me on this.”

*Here, there. Would it really matter?* She didn’t want to think about the consequences of either choice. “Why do you think you’re seeing more healings now than before?”

“Truthfully? I think it’s because Medichero’s most extraordinary medicine man has joined the hospital staff. And he’s around more now than before.” Jeff paused, then

added: "They say he's gifted." His eyes moved to meet hers, making a silent understated exclamation.

"And who would that be?" Henrietta asked, but had a sick feeling that she already knew what he was going to say.

"Bears Repeating."

"Jeff," she said. She exhaled and leaned back away from her husband. "You don't mean that crazy Indian who just made a spectacle in our kitchen? You can't be serious. Joe Loco is your gifted healer?" She had heard many times before that Joe's native name was Bears Repeating. She also knew that he worked at the hospital with Jeff as some sort of aide, but at the moment, couldn't remember exactly how Jeff had described his function.

"Yep," Jeff said. He smiled.

"Jeff, you know I love you. And I love Altie. But I have to be honest. That guy's not exactly credible. He says the most outlandish things. He talks about dead dogs and wounded souls that have fragmented. And he's funny even when he's not trying to be. He's got some kind of Elvis fetish, I think. He wears blue-suede moccasins and a pompadour, for heaven's sakes."

"Joe's more than he appears," Jeff said. He stood and walked back to the piano.

"I've also seen him sitting like a Buddhist on the hill over there for hours," she said, pointing out the window. "And wearing Catholic rosary beads like a necklace."

Jeff's smile broadened, but he wasn't laughing. "Since Joe started working at the hospital, there have been comprehensive healings of patients that I considered beyond hope."

"You're kidding." *Could this really be true? Could this Joe Loco and his strange bear medicine actually help me?*

"Despite, let's say, a few idiosyncrasies, all of the medicine men, including the elders, respect him and consider him a great healer ... and so do I."

"What's different about him? No, scratch that. It's obvious there's something different about him," she said. "What I meant to ask was this: What exactly is Joe doing to influence these miraculous healings?" It surprised her that her old writer's curiosity resurfaced; it had lain dormant far too long. She really wanted to know what Joe was doing.

"It won't make sense unless you understand the basis for their medicine, which is also their religion."

"So explain it."

Jeff grinned. "I'm not sure I can, without sounding like a raving heretic." He lit another cigarette.

"Just give it a shot," she said. "I promise not to tell Father O'Reilly." Father O'Reilly was a Roman Catholic priest at St. Paul's Mission, the only church on the reservation. "Or anyone back home," she added in a whisper.

“Well, okay. Let’s see.” Jeff paused as if considering how to begin his answer. He pushed the piano keys softly, playing a few light chords. As government housing went on Indian reservations, pianos were not standard issue. So Jeff and Henrietta had been surprised to find one already there, as well as the unexpected Victorian-style doctor’s cottage, which had been built in the early 1900s. They considered the large furnished house and the piano good omens for the missions in Medichero.

“Joe says it’s got something to do with tapping into this ... this thing the Medichero call...” Jeff paused before speaking slowly and with reverence, “*Bik’ehgo’ihi’dan’ binádidzotí.*”

“Bick ah ... what?”

“*Bik’ehgo’ihi’dan’ binádidzotí.* It’s Apache that translates into something like God’s breath. The Medichero describe it as a kind of loving and creative presence that’s in and around everything, including us, nature and even inanimate objects. But sometimes they just call it all the Great Mystery.”

“That’s certainly easier to pronounce.” Henrietta smiled and leaned forward.

“My colleagues would call it animism. No, sorry, they’d say it was radical nonsense and treat me like the hemorrhoids of the medical community,” Jeff said.

“What does that mean?”

“A pain in the ass that’s fairly easy to cut out.”

She smiled. “I know what hemorrhoids are, silly. I meant what does animism mean?”

“Of course.” He grinned. “Animism is the belief that animals and objects, like rocks and such, as well as natural phenomena, like wind, fire and water, all possess a certain level of consciousness with the ability to communicate. Of course, there’s more to it, and I’m just starting to understand. But I’m trying.”

She looked at her husband and frowned. “Geez, Jeff, I’m surprised you’re taking their beliefs so seriously. You’ve always been so ... so science-oriented. And besides that, you were raised a Baptist!”

“Yeah, I know,” he said and smiled. “But right now, I’m just trying to understand what *they* believe they’re doing to make these healings happen. And don’t forget I’ve actually witnessed a few things I can’t yet explain with medical science. Then there’s the lab. I’m really excited about what I’m starting to see there.”

“Like what?”

“I’ve been running tests with cells and bacteria in petri dishes while Joe and some of the other medicine men are in ritual meditation. And both the cells and bacteria are somehow being positively affected.”

“I find it incredible that the medicine men are actually going along with your experiments.”

He nodded. “It turns out that some of the younger ones are as curious about the test results as I am. I can hardly wait to hook them up to my new EEG.”

Henrietta looked hard into her husband's blue eyes and realized there would be no chance of changing his mind. But she still feared getting further involved in what was definitely forbidden in their southern Christian world. And she worried about Jeff's daring to venture outside the lines and protocols of conventional medicine.

"You won't get into trouble for poking your nose in the Indians' medicine, will you?" she asked. "Remember the Department of the Interior's edict not to interfere with or encourage their spirit medicine, or whatever they call it."

"Nah. I don't think the government guys will find out, and I'm certainly not going to tell them right now." He gestured with his hand, causing ashes to fall to the carpet.

"Well, I wouldn't want you stirring up trouble with your employer, just when we've finally found a little peace ourselves." Henrietta pursed her lips, unable to ignore the ashes.

"I'm not worried, really," he said, putting the cigarette in an ashtray on the piano. "Besides, Ray Santana and his brothers are probably more concerned about my interest in their spirit medicine than the government guys would be."

"Is that supposed to make me feel better?"

"Oh, sorry, Peaches, I shouldn't have brought that up."

"Please tell me they're not dangerous?"

"I know Ray and particularly his brother Victor look a little intimidating, and they've startled me a time or two, showing up unexpectedly in dark corners or spying on me through my office window since we arrived on this mission. But I've gotten used to them being around—they seem pretty harmless." He shrugged his shoulders.

"Why are they watching you like that?"

"I'm not supposed to know this. But apparently they've recently been charged by the Medichero elders to safeguard their so-called old ways from, let's say, outsiders like us. But I really believe their bark is worse than their bite." He lit another cigarette, though the other still burned in the ashtray.

"Well, I've learned it's not smart to go around teasing dogs, especially ones that look like pit bulls," Henrietta said. She stood and put her hands on her hips.

"I'm not teasing dogs or Indians who might resemble pit bulls." Jeff chuckled. "Joe and I can handle the Santanas."

"Oh, right. That Joe's a really scary guy. What is he, about 145 pounds?"

"Would it make you feel better about Joe if I told you that he's well educated? And has an extensive home library?"

"Maybe. But only if he can throw books at those brothers to defend you."

"Very funny. But I bet you'd be surprised to learn that Joe has an undergraduate degree in psychology."

"You win the bet. I couldn't be more surprised."

"Well, get this: he also has a medical degree!"

"Okay, now I know you're just pulling my leg!"

"No, I'm dead serious," Jeff said.

“Holy cow, Jeff!”

“Joe’s higher education does give him added credibility, even though he doesn’t really use it in any official way. He hasn’t filed for a residency program yet, even though I’ve told him many I’m happy to supervise him,” Jeff said. “He simply won’t answer directly when I ask him about it. Maybe he’s just not ready. But, in any event, what’s important to remember is that he’s smart and well respected within the tribe as a true healer, which means if he’s participating in my research, everything’s copacetic. So you don’t have to worry about Ray Santana and his brothers.”

“I’ll try not to,” Henrietta said. She sat next to him on the piano bench. “I just don’t want you to cause a problem here. Okay?” She leaned her head on his shoulder.

“I won’t, I promise. But honestly, I care more about not causing a problem for you.” He caressed the back of her neck.

“Oh, Jeff.” She sighed and kissed him tenderly on the lips, thinking about how much she loved him, despite everything that had happened to her and the secret she believed she had to hide from him.

“But seriously, Henrietta, you know me.” He turned and took her in his arms. “If I didn’t believe this spirit medicine had the potential to help modern medicine save lives, or if I thought it was too great a risk, I wouldn’t be here and I wouldn’t want you and the kids here either.”

She nodded. “I know.”

“But this research ... it’s become almost like a sacred thing to me,” he whispered. He placed Henrietta’s right hand over his heart. “I’ve got to find out more about what they’re doing that heals people. And I think I will.”

“I understand. But I’m not sure what you want me to say.”

“I just need you to say that you’re on board with my work, even though there might be some slight opposition to it. I’d love to see you return to your writing and be happy with me, right here, or wherever we might choose to live for the rest of our lives.”

Henrietta’s eyes began to water. “Oh, Jeff. You know I’m happy to be with you, no matter what you’re doing or where we are. And I’ve just hit a dry spell with my writing, that’s all. Of course that happens to even the best of writers. But it doesn’t mean I can’t be excited about your work. And as strange as it all sounds, I think your research is noble. Besides, I don’t want to go back to South Carolina right now, anyway.” Her voice cracked and a tear ran down her cheek.

“Hey now, let’s not get upset again.” He pushed back her hair, sticky from the moisture on her face. “Your parents are going to be fine in Georgia.”

It wasn’t why she was crying. But, out of habit, she let him think that it was.

“Jeff, there’s something I’ve been needing to tell you.” Henrietta’s voice turned to a whisper at the same time the grandfather clock in the foyer began to chime.

“Oh no, the time,” Jeff interrupted. “I was so caught up in talking about Joe and my research, I completely forgot about relieving Dr. Belzer. Can it wait until tonight? I should run.”

They both got up and walked quickly toward the kitchen, Jeff's forgotten cigarette ashes trailing behind him.

"I guess so," she said.

"Why don't you try getting back to your writing today? Love you," he said, not waiting for an answer. He pecked her on the cheek after grabbing his navy cardigan and brown medicine bag off the top of the washstand, then headed out the door.

She stood there alone, arms by her sides, feeling defeated again.

### ***(An Excerpt from Chapter 3)***

"Why doesn't Joe wear a full traditional costume like the other medicine men?" Henrietta asked Altie, Joe's wife. Before delving into her new writing idea, she figured she'd better first learn as much as she could about Bears Repeating.

"He likes to say we are more than the costumes and traditions we wear."

"Hmm." Henrietta was beginning to realize that many of Joe's statements were often messages hidden in metaphor.

"Joe considers himself a Quero Apache, Tlish Diyan medicine man, Catholic, Buddhist and more," Altie continued. "He is also half white."

Henrietta shook her head. "Well, bless his heart. Altie, I'd really like to know how all of that came about."

Altie nodded, and in her usual slow, stilted tone explained that Joe's mother, Bird, was a descendent of a long line of great Medichero Indian medicine men and women. Henrietta learned that Joe's biological father was a photographer passing through on an ornithological assignment for *National Geographic*, but apparently, found the exotic Bird Mancito more interesting. Although the unknown photographer spent a couple of months with Bird, he took off and never returned after she became pregnant. Bird was left with a half-breed baby, Joe. But she loved and nurtured him, and like most of their tribesmen, raised him as a Catholic at the reservation's St. Paul's Mission Church. When Joe was eleven, Bird married Sam Loco, a full-blooded Mescalero Apache, who adopted Joe and treated him like his own son.

"Bird is also more than a Catholic," Altie said. Then she paused, and Henrietta thought maybe Altie was embarrassed about having told too much of Joe's illegitimate birth. But she continued anyway, saying that Bird decided to teach Joe her own brand of spirit medicine, the Tlish Diyan philosophies of her Quero Apache ancestors. Later, because of Joe's obviously high intelligence and her practical nature, Bird encouraged her son to go to the white man's schools and then on to medical school where he also had an opportunity to explore other cultures and religions.

"Doesn't his, um, combining of religions and philosophies pose a problem here? Isn't his approach a bit confusing for the people here?" Henrietta wanted to ask a million

questions, but remembered Apache etiquette. “My questions ... I don’t mean to be rude.” She covered her mouth with her hand.

Altie shrugged. “It is okay.”

“It’s just that Joe’s such a fascinating man,” Henrietta said honestly.

“I have found this to be true also,” Altie said. Her face remained as expressionless as her voice.

“Mama, I’m hungry,” Frannie said, pulling on Henrietta’s sleeve.

“Can we get something to eat at the concessions?” Annie asked.

“Sure, let’s go on our way to the craft booths,” Henrietta said. “I love their tamales.”

It was starting to get dark by the time they returned to the stands still full of tamales, piñon nuts and fry bread. By then, the girls were wearing colorful beaded necklaces they’d made, and Indian spectators were moving into the grandstands in faithful migrations.

“The Dance of the Mountain Spirits will begin soon. Let us get a seat,” Altie said.

A great bonfire, probably eight-foot tall and just about as wide blazed in the middle of the earthen stage. Henrietta and the girls sat awestruck in quiet anticipation. Jeffie had fallen asleep in his stroller. Altie covered him with a blanket against the cool night air. She also pulled out four wool shawls from her backpack, handing one to each of them before putting the fourth over her shoulders.

Once the grandstands were filled with spectators, Henrietta’s heartbeat accelerated as four colorfully garbed, athletic-looking Mountain Spirit performers entered from out of the shadows cast by the Holy Lodge teepee. They sang and danced, but not always in unison. They wore traditional ocher-colored buckskin kilts, sashes and mid-calf moccasins, all vibrantly beaded and encrusted with tiny cone-shaped tins that jingled as they moved. Unlike the feathered headdresses of powwow dancers, the Mountain Spirits wore fan-shaped head coverings that looked like tall wood planks tethered vertically. Black hoods made the four men faceless, unearthly and somewhat frightening. Their bare torsos were brush-painted with celestial symbols, while their muscular biceps were draped with red streamers and eagle feathers. At the end of each dancer’s waist-sash hung a tin bell the size of a large apple, providing added rhythm to their singing and dancing calisthenics.

Behind the fourth Mountain Spirit dancer, a klutzy Joe Loco performed brilliantly his role of the sacred *Libayé*, said to be a living paradox, displaying implied power through weak and awkward movements. His purpose was to highlight the vivid eminence and divine imagery of the Mountain Spirit dancers by providing a necessary contrast. As he raised his knees and jerked his booted feet around in exaggerated circles, Joe intentionally moved out of step with the others.

But in the finale, all performed in synchronized choreography as the leader struck his thighs with sticks to establish order and set a dancing pace. For an encore, they ran all at once toward the great bonfire, hooting like deranged owls. Although she wasn’t quite

sure what it all meant, Henrietta knew they had just witnessed something sacred and secret.

After they were on the steep path home, Henrietta asked in a low, respectful voice about Joe's injury.

"He considers it the greatest blessing of his life," Altie said.

"You and Joe are perfect for one another. You both like to speak in riddles."

Altie offered a rare smile. "Joe was not always a gifted medicine man." She continued to explain that at age eighteen, Joe was attacked by a grizzly she-bear attending her cubs. She bit off part of Joe's rear end and most of his left calf muscle. Afterward, she took her cubs away, leaving Joe bleeding profusely and near death.

"Well, he obviously didn't die," Henrietta said.

"*Ha'aa*, but he did."

"Come on, Altie."

After Joe's physical body expired, he traveled to what Altie described as the land of Spirit, where he met some of his ancestors and talked with a number of spiritual beings he would later call Ascended Masters. They told Joe that it wasn't his time to leave this life yet and he would be sent back. But while in Spirit, he learned about his life's purpose and mission. If he was willing, Joe would spend the rest of this life seeking out the Great Spirit's true medicines as well as the universal principles in all religions, including his own. He would bear witness to the Great Spirit's truth and repeat ancient healing secrets. And in the process, he'd be able to help the sick and heal the soul-wounded. Joe agreed to the plan wholeheartedly and was returned, carrying healing gifts and spiritual knowledge he did not possess before the bear incident. After he regained consciousness, Joe dressed his wounds with bandages that he made from his torn clothing. He used a pine branch as a crutch to get home, where his mother, Bird, nursed him back to health. Bears Repeating was his native name from that point on.

"Wow, that's an amazing story," Henrietta said with a new and genuine appreciation for Joe Loco. She was beginning to think that maybe this man would be able to help her. After a few minutes, she turned toward her friend. "Altie, would you mind if I asked you about the soul retrieval?"